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Sens. Toy, Cassis hear from students who want cherry as state's official fruit

LANSING – Members of the Michigan Senate's Local, Urban and State Affairs Committee heard testimony today from an enthusiastic group of third graders, who would like the cherry to become the official state fruit, said state Sens. Laura M. Toy and Nancy Cassis.

"This is a great lesson for our future leaders to learn about their state government and how it works," said Sen. Toy, R-Livonia, who chairs the committee. "It was also educational for members of our committee to learn from all of the research these students have done to support their position."

The students are members of Cathy Stando's third grade class at Heritage Elementary School in Highland Township. In supporting the legislation they noted that Michigan currently has no state fruit, yet leads the nation in the production of tart cherries.

"It is so important to engage our young people and to get them excited about the democratic process," said Cassis, R-Novi, who sponsored Senate Bill 1013 after being approached by the class. "These students have done an excellent job making their case. I'm proud to support them in seeking recognition of our state's role as America's cherry capital and the impact this has on Michigan's economy."

Michigan producers took in \$47 million from tart cherry sales in 2005, accounting for more than 75 percent of the nationwide total. Another \$16 million in sweet cherries were sold in 2005.

Also cited by the young activists were the nutritional properties of cherries which are rich in antioxidants that may help prevent cancer. A recent study also suggests that tart cherries contain significant amounts of a hormone that has been credited with slowing the aging process.

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